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## THE REASONABLE APPEAL OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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In the popular mind, the Book of Revelation is doubtless the most difficult of all New Testament writings. Whether it deserves that reputation may well be doubted, for there are other books of the Bible in which scholars would probably say that the unsolved problems are more fundamental. But the Book of Revelation stands at the end of the collection, and few readers penetrate so far. It seems remote from modern habits of thought and expression. It lends itself for the most part less readily to the practical, if sometimes superficial, use of the ordinary reader.

This sense of the difficulty of the book is no merely modern phenomenon. Among certain groups of the past, to be sure, Revelation has ever been a favorite book. The dreamers about the future have enjoyed it, and used its prophecies to frame their own pictures of what they hoped for. The insurgents against established order have turned to their own account its fierce reproaches against a tyrannous civilization. The oppressed have found in it comfort. But with those men of the ancient Church with whom we as educated men and rational thinkers have most sympathy, the scholars of the Greek Church, we find a different attitude. Revelation was, indeed, at the outset generally accepted. In the second century it was among the earliest books to be included in the growing New Testament. Hardly anyone doubted its right to be counted there. Yet in the third century the Greek theologians of Alexandria — Origen and those whom he influ-

enced — were repelled by it, as are many today. Scholarly training could not understand it, and could not reconcile itself to its strange thought and grotesque expression. Origen, in that century, retained the book, but he made no secret of his unsympathetic attitude; and those who came after him found ground for denying that it had been written by an Apostle, and so for excluding it from the New Testament. For centuries it was in debate in the Greek Church. The great Syrian Church — farther in the East — had its New Testament from the Greeks, and received it without the Book of Revelation, so that to this day it is not a part of the official Syrian New Testament.

The Roman Church of the early centuries, more dependent on authority and tradition, less accustomed to independent rational reflection, held fast to this ancient document, and it was largely through Roman influence that the Revelation was finally accepted by the Greeks. But its history from the third to the fifth century shows that it presented to our spiritual ancestors difficulties similar to those which it has offered to many of us.

What is the reason for this difficulty which the book has caused? It is due mainly to the fact that the original readers for whom the book was intended lived in a different intellectual world from us and from Origen. The literature they read has only in part survived, the ideas which made their background have given place to others. They knew and loved this kind of prophetic vision; to us it is foreign. They recognized its purpose and understood its method; for us these things have all to be reconstructed by an effort of the imagination, and through the aid of erudition, often drawn from fields but rarely entered.

In consequence of this the mode of approach to the book has generally been radically wrong. The method of explanation adopted has not suited the nature and structure of the thing to be explained, and thus for the most part.

interpretation has only involved in darkness the secrets which this book was meant to throw into the highest light.

About the Book of Revelation hundreds of books have been written. Most of them — including some of the longest — are worthless. Even the genius of Sir Isaac Newton added less than nothing to that great man's fame when it exercised itself upon this theme. Learning, ingenuity, infinite labor have all proved to be wasted when guided by a perverse theory of what was to be sought. In all intellectual effort aptness in framing the right question is the most important art, the highest flower of scholarship. The failure of interpretation of the Book of Revelation has been due to defective judgment at that point.

The older interpreters were apt to seek in the book an historical picture of worldly events which were future to the writer, and which are known to us from the later course of history. As a prophet he foresaw and foretold the future. With great ingenuity and in very variant ways the commentator's place in the great drama was elicited. The events portrayed up to that point were identified with known historic facts. The enemies who are brought upon the scene with such distinctness, and devoted so confidently to destruction, were always his own, the learned and earnest commentator's, peculiar enemies. Against them he was thus able to quote the authority of holy writ. Of their speedy downfall he had comfortable assurance.

If you were a heretic or a schismatic, you believed that the Pope of Rome and the organized Church were the great foes of truth and righteousness, and you would be able to declare them to be the Beast and the False Prophet, and to find in the history of their misdeeds the events prophesied by the ancient seer. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the book was abundantly used by the partisans of the Emperor against the Pope. But if in that same period you were Pope Innocent III, you

could gain by the same method a prophetic denunciation of the Saracens and Mohammed, and could reckon out the predestined length of their power. If, somewhat later, you were a Protestant, the enemy was the papacy. Romanist writers have believed the book to foretell the wickedness of Martin Luther, whom the Lutherans on the contrary found referred to as the angel "flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth," and saying "with a great voice, 'Fear God and give him glory . . . and worship him that hath made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters.'"

According to your politics it was possible to direct the thunders of the Holy Bible against Napoleon Bonaparte, or the liberal movement of 1848, when Satan was loosed, or the power of the Slavic and German Empires, concealed under the names of Gog and Magog. The appalling catastrophe of the Great War of today has called forth similar interpretations.

And the numbers in the book, the thousand years, the forty and two months, the 1260 days, the mystic 666, lent themselves to endless fascinating calculations of just how long these various powers of evil should be permitted to exercise their baneful sway, and how soon the people of God might hope for final divine intervention.

This method of interpretation was obviously useful, but as obviously unsafe and unconvincing. It contained the seed of its own destruction, and could only lead to the abandonment of all use of the book. As a heaven-bestowed eternal calendar, the book proved a failure; as a philosophy of modern history, its point of view was indeterminable.

Throughout Christian history, however, and in recent years with great seriousness a wholly different and far more sober mode of approach to the book has been followed, and has been advocated with vast learning. In

this majestic picture, it is said, the author is not prophesying the historical future now known to us, but reflects the events and conditions of his own time as he knew it. These enemies from the Euphrates were the Parthians in one of their incursions upon the civilized world; the earthquakes and wars are to be identified with the events of the first century; the flight of the woman is the retreat of the Christians from Jerusalem before the siege. We have to look not for prophecy, but for history, known to the writer, and re-told by him in figure and symbol in order to show that in his time the prophecies of old have been fulfilled, that the end of all things has arrived, and that the great deliverance stands before the door ready now to enter, bringing divine succor and victory to the elect.

This general view, the archæological and historical interpretation of the book from the events of the writer's time, has in it much that is true, and it prevailed among the wise scholars of the later nineteenth century, but it breaks down when applied in detail as a complete explanation of the dramatic story. No satisfactory historical sequence can be made out, and this whole system of interpretation fails to do justice to the plain intention of the writer to offer prophecy, not history. A book like Daniel, written in the second century before Christ in the name of a faithful hero of four hundred years earlier, can naturally put into his mouth prophecies after the event, relating to the intervening course of historical affairs between Daniel and the writer, but the Book of Revelation purports to be written not by a leader of the past but by a contemporary. The seer is expressly told, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. . . . Behold, I come quickly"; the Lord "sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass."

These methods of attack upon the problem, then, are unsuccessful, and leave it a hard book. How shall it be

made easier ? With what key shall we essay to unlock its secret ?

To this question the only real answer is the successful application of the right key. We may, however, with profit indicate some of the methods which present-day study of Revelation employs, and which make easier this book which has seemed so hard.

In the first place may be put a simpler and less sophisticated attitude toward the book. It must be taken for what it purports to be, if it is to be understood. Older interpreters tried to find in it a panorama of modern history based on supernatural knowledge; later scholars thought the writer was giving us a great symbolic picture of his own times based on observation and information. These were assumptions, sophisticated views founded on the belief that an inspired book must have a certain character and reveal certain things. Let us permit the book to teach us what it will, not what we will. Let us avoid reading into it things and ideas that only a person who can look back on nearly two millenniums of history since the birth of Christ could possibly know. Is not this a more reverent, as it is certainly a more fruitful, mode of approach to any book of the New Testament ?

With this simpler attitude to the book belongs a right view of the nature of prophecy and of vision. Prophecy is not a chronicle unrolled from the wrong end, a mere history read beforehand. The significance of prophecy does not lie in useless information about events of the future which it is divinely empowered to convey, information which is interesting solely as a miracle. Its significance lies in the great principles of God's activity which it has been vouchsafed to the prophet to grasp. His account of the future is really a statement of one way in which these principles might work out, and is always figurative, symbolical, and in large measure vague. In the nature of the case, insofar as a prophecy is definite, it will generally be

wrong. This view of prophecy makes it possible for us to approach this book with simple-minded readiness to take what it gives us, and without feeling the necessity of somehow transforming its prophetic pictures into correspondence with what we suppose to be the facts intended.

Similarly the modern conception of the nature of visions enables us to understand better this book of visions. Visions take place, and they may be involuntary. But in them is used the material with which the seer's mind and imagination are already filled. The elements of which they are made — the stuff of these dreams — are ideas drawn from many quarters and often traceable. The value of a vision does not come from its supernaturalness as attested by its inexplicability, but depends rather on the moral and spiritual worth of the idea which it enshrines and expresses. For these reasons a sharp and strict line cannot be drawn between visions as involuntary experiences, later written down, and visions as a literary form. Both are the work of the imagination, operating in much the same way. The seer may often not know whether he thought he saw with inner vision these things of the spiritual world, or whether he only described them as if he had seen. And it makes but little difference to us which was the case. Sheer supernaturalness has no inherent moral or spiritual value. In a book like the Revelation we must treat the complicated series as having a rational unity and relation of parts. Many signs betray artistic adjustment and careful plan, the use of earlier materials, the weaving of them together by the cunning thought and skill of an author. That he had visions, and many of these very visions, who shall deny? But this book is no fortuitous accumulation of separate atoms; it is an organic system of visions, not a dream tale.

This leads us to the second method of modern study which makes this Apocalypse easier. It is the comparative study of apocalyptic writing as a branch of Jewish



and Christian literature. We have here no isolated instance of this kind of book, but only one branch of a great, wide-spreading tree. Apocalypses were merely the form which Jewish prophecy took in the later days of Jewish history and which was imitated by Christian writers. The greatest of Jewish apocalyptic writings is the book of Daniel. With it seems to start the series, which includes the Books of Enoch, in themselves a whole library of apocalypses, the Assumption of Moses, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Apocalypse of Ezra (II Esdras of the English Apocrypha). The Christian writings in which the long list was continued are mostly little known, and their names need not be recounted. From the ancient Apocalypses of Peter and Paul through many later examples down to modern times we have such books.

These books are prophecies; and here it is worth while to pause and notice the difference between a Utopia and an Apocalypse. A utopia sets forth an ideal condition of human society, as it might conceivably develop. Plato, in his *Republic*, Sir Thomas More, the modern Socialists, and countless other portrayers of an imaginary perfect state have thought out and described how they would like the world to be. The writers of apocalypses have not done this. They have observed, or have apprehended by faith, the forces at work in the world, and have assessed in the light of faith their present and future relative strength, and so have described not what the world ought to be, but what it will be. As with all prophets, the moral and religious value of their work lies not in their success in hitting on the right details of the future development of the world's history, but on their insight in seeing the deep forces and their interplay. The final outcome of any apocalypse written from the theistic point of view must of course be the triumph of God, however brought about. But the forces now working may be leading primarily and directly to a very different goal. Hopefulness of the ulti-

mate issue may be entirely consistent with despair as to the immediate and temporary outcome.<sup>1</sup>

The Book of Revelation thus becomes intelligible when it is recognized that it is written in part by the conventional methods which can be studied in other writings of its class.

A third method of modern study is also important. The material of apocalypses, the figures and symbols, the locusts, the dragon, the scarlet woman, the tree of life, the sea of glass mingled with fire, the horsemen, the harvesters, the gates of pearl, the walls of precious stones, the river of life — these and countless more, smaller and greater, are not here used for the first time. They do not spring directly from the needs of the writer's own expression. They are conventional, traditional, derived. Some of them represent the mythology and folk-lore of many peoples and times. Some of them are suggested by political and physical events of the writer's own time. They belong to the apocalyptic type. It is the task of the student to examine them in detail, to discover, if he can, by

<sup>1</sup> A book in the form of a modern novel, published in 1908, entitled *Lord of the World*, written by a Roman Catholic, the late Mgr. R. H. Benson, is an instructive example of a modern apocalypse. In this imaginary picture is worked out the great issue, as Mgr. Benson conceives it, between the individualism of Christian religion on the one hand and the communism of secularism on the other. The result is first the purification of the Church through persecution, then the triumph of the forces of this world by virtue of their superior physical power — a gloomy view which might seem to contradict faith in a ruling God. But this is only the preliminary stage, the "woes" of the end of the present age. The consummation arrives, as in the old apocalypses, by the direct intervention of God, the end of this material world, and the introduction of the coming age in which, in a new world, not our own, the rule of God is complete. With rare literary skill and restraint the picture of the future is unfolded. We see again the old figure of Antichrist, but in modern dress, and have presented to us a modern development and interpretation of the whole machinery of apocalyptic thought. This striking book is a good commentary on the New Testament Apocalypse, for it shows the vitality of this type of literature and its aptness for the effective expression of a self-consistent view of the essential nature of the great underlying spiritual realities, good and bad, as they appear to a serious observer. Whatever one may think of Father Benson's doctrine, to the student of the New Testament and of the history of literature his book is of the greatest interest.

comparative study, their origin, to trace their history, and so to account for their form in this book and to learn the particular sense in which this writer has used them. Thus it becomes possible to distinguish between form and substance, between mode of expression and the emotions and aspirations and convictions out of which in ways now beautiful, now grotesque, but always powerful, the utterances of the apocalyptic seer have sprung.

This is a laborious but fascinating task, not yet completed. To not all of our questions here will the attainable knowledge of ancient thought permit an answer. Yet enough has been recovered to enable us to see how the rest must have arisen, even in cases where we cannot point to the actual source of the apocalyptic language.

The greatest source here is the Old Testament, and the first condition of understanding the Book of Revelation is to observe how much of it is the echo and repetition of Old Testament language and imagery. The writer must have known that he was reproducing and codifying and recombining Old Testament prophecies. He must have been aiming, in part, to show how under Christian principles these prophecies still held good, and how the Christian Church might with clearer vision, and in an awed sense of the nearness of the great culmination, still use this great inheritance from the Hebrew seers.

In these three ways then the Book of Revelation can be made easier than Christians have often supposed: by a simpler attitude of willingness to take it for what it appears to be, without trying to make out of it what we might wish to find there; by recognizing through comparative study of other apocalypses the conventional character of the type of literature to which it belongs; and by a study of the sources from which the detailed imagery is drawn and by which that imagery is to be explained.

Before passing on to speak of the origin and contents of the book itself a word should be said as to some of the elements, not all of which are always recognized, which give this book its greatness as a monument of the world's literature. For that it is, wholly apart from the reverence for it produced by its place in the New Testament. To a degree remarkable in view of the general sense of its unintelligibility it has entered into the living thought of men. We talk in its phrases, and in a hundred ways are subject to its influence.

The cause is in part the majesty of its imagery. Of this no illustration need be given, or can be without citing continuous sections. Whatever the underlying ideas, their expression is sublime, and may well be set on a level with the greatest that has proceeded from human pens.

Again, its greatness arises in part from its deep roots in popular modes of thought. It stands close to folk-lore, from beginning to end. This may suggest superstition and triviality. Quite the reverse. A relation to folk-lore is characteristic of nearly all great literature. Homer, the Greek dramatists, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Faust — the greatest literature, like the greatest music, has its roots deep in the soil, includes the combination into beautiful and powerful elaboration of those things which the simple but profound thought of the plainest of the people has struck out with the imaginative genius and freedom of intellectual childhood. Not the sublimated conceptions of the highest culture, but the broad passion of the peasant constitutes the soil for the intellectual products which survive by their greatness.

Further, the Book of Revelation is permanently great literature not only because of its noble form of expression, and because it is close to the thought of humanity on a large scale, but because of its hold on profound spiritual truths. This gave it its place in the Bible. This is what has endeared it to the Christian heart. This will perpetu-

ate its use and will lead men to read it and to be stirred by it, and increasingly as it is better explained and understood.

Let us turn then to the Book itself.

It was written, we are told by Irenaeus, who lived a hundred years later, "near the end of the reign of Domitian," who died in the year 96 of our era. The reader may remind himself that the crucifixion of our Lord took place in the year 29 or 30, the martyrdoms of the Apostles Peter and Paul not far from the year 64, and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70.

This statement of Irenaeus corresponds to the facts of the book and to the situation in the Church which the book seems to reflect, and is on the whole to be accepted for the final composition of the book in its present form. It was thus probably written a generation or more after the Epistles of Paul, probably somewhat later than the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, and was perhaps nearly contemporary with the Gospel of John.

The place of writing was evidently Asia Minor. The book opens with messages for seven of the chief churches of that region, plainly coming from some one who has intimate knowledge of their inner state.

We can gain a clear idea of the situation. The churches of Asia Minor were made up, like those of the cities of Greece and of Rome, mainly of persons who had been heathen, not of Jews. But these were in great measure men and women who before becoming Christians had already been profoundly influenced by Jewish ideas and ways. They had often been attendants at the services of the local Jewish synagogue. They knew the Old Testament, and valued it. They recognized that Christianity rested on Judaism, and they liked Jewish literature and ways of thinking. At the same time they were not Jews. Their natural associations were largely with their heathen neighbors. By the time the Book of Revelation was written

the life of these churches had been going on for thirty or forty years. The first flush of Christian enthusiasm was past. Various dangers already beset the Church, and were apparent to the watchful eye. Paul's old enemies, the Jews, were still active in their hostility to the Church, which had supplanted them in their best field of progress and proselytism. From another side speculative religious teachers, within and without the Christian circle, were raising their heads. They combined attractive ideas drawn from many religions and philosophies into a new mixture, and were in a sense progenitors of the later Gnostics. As was natural to religious thinkers of a low order whose interests were primarily intellectual and not moral, who were ready to draw from heathen mythologies and cults, and who habitually turned toward the blurring moral intoxication of asceticism, these teachers were often lax in matters of morals upon which the Church leaders justly laid stress.

From the surrounding world came constant incitement to share in the pleasures and customs of a civilization founded on and impregnated with heathen worship. Idolatry and heathenish immorality were insistent. The worship of heathen divinities in one form or another, the sharing in the festivities of idolatrous sacrificial feasts, the licentiousness of daily habit — all these things were a constant danger and temptation to these Christians, who, we must remember, were, after all, but human, as we are.

The only form of religion established and imposed by the government upon all loyal citizens (except Jews) was the one which appears with great distinctness in the Book of Revelation — the worship of the Roman Emperor. This had arisen in the East, and had finally been adopted by authority as the necessary religious basis of the unity of the Empire. Temples of the Emperor were springing up in the first century. Asia Minor was a great seat of this worship. To refuse to do the acts of reverence which it

required was to present oneself in the guise of a traitor to one's sovereign, and left no recourse to the authorities but to punish. This supreme form of idolatry, peculiarly abhorrent to the Christian mind, showed itself clearly to the writer of our book as the culmination of the work of the powers of darkness. In this devilish institution the final effort of the long world-struggle of evil against God was to be discerned.

The earlier stages of persecution had already been passed when our book was written. One martyr, Antipas at Pergamum, is named. The clear-seeing eye of the writer has already recognized that the danger of direct persecution is increasing, and that it centres in the public institution of the worship of the Emperor. How far persecution had gone is hard to say; the general impression left by the book is that the writer and the readers were well used to it.

The period is one of the most important in the history of the Christian Church, and it is unfortunate that we have so little direct historical account of it preserved for us. For the greater part of our knowledge we are dependent on inferences from this book and from the other literature of the time.

Who was the writer is not known. Apocalypses were generally written in the name of some hero of the distant past, such as Enoch, Noah, Moses, Elijah, Baruch, Daniel, Ezra, who was supposed to have foreseen these things, and we can generally detect the real writer's date by noticing, as in the Book of Daniel, the point where the prophecy ceases to correspond exactly to history, and becomes real prophecy. But not so with our book. It is frankly written for the present, and the writer's name is given as John. The unsettled critical inquiries as to whether the opening verses and the name John are a later addition to the original book we cannot here consider.<sup>2</sup> The Church has gen-

<sup>2</sup> The same is true of the inquiries into the possible composite structure of the book which have much occupied critical scholars. The book as it stands is an artistically

erally, but not always, believed that this was the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, from whom the great Fourth Gospel and the three Epistles are alleged to come. But modern critical scholars, like some ancient critics, find it hard to believe that the two authors are the same. And the problem of authorship must here be left unsolved.

The purpose of the author is not difficult to see. It is purely practical, not at all speculative or theological. He will warn and encourage his fellow-Christians — warn them against worldliness and down-heartedness, two evils near akin, and encourage them to confidence in the object of their faith, in the power of God, and in God's ultimate victory even over the great forces which are soon to assemble themselves for the last great onset. This book shall stir the reader's feeling, and fire his imagination, and so fit him to survive the great and dreadful test which lies before God's little flock.

So we pass to the contents of these visions.

The book is in the form of a letter, with opening greeting and farewell salutation. But this is only a convenient literary form, a kind of dedication to the seven Churches whose members and their needs were particularly in the writer's mind.

The letter opens with a description of a wonderful vision granted to the seer, in the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor. He became possessed by the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and saw the Lord Jesus Christ, surrounded with symbols of his great attributes and authority, many of these being drawn from the Old Testament. From him at that time he received his call to be a prophet, like that of Isaiah in the temple before the seraphim. "Write, therefore, the things which thou hast seen [the description of the vision], and the things which are [the inspired comments on the actual condition of the

framed whole, and as such is the subject of the present article. The reader curious about these theories will find a guide in James Moffatt's *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*.



seven churches which occupy chapters 2 and 3], and the things which shall come to pass hereafter" [the visions of the future which fill the remainder of the book]. (Chap. 1.)

On the details of the early chapters, containing messages to the seven churches, we cannot dwell. They are constructed with singular literary skill, largely out of materials drawn from the Old Testament, and contain a number of allusions still recognizable to local matters at Pergamum, Thyatira, and the other cities, as well as many valuable hints about the religious situation in those places. Here, as in the rest of the book, the explanation in detail is a matter for study, and is full of interest. (Chaps. 2 and 3.)

After these things, the seer having now received his special instructions for the churches of these localities, a door is opened into heaven, and the seer passes through it to be granted a vision of God on his throne — a vision of gorgeous splendor and dazzling light. Grouped about God's throne are the members of the heavenly court — the four cherubim, in shape like living creatures, and the twenty-four angelic elders, who all render worship day and night and cry aloud with doxologies of praise, and with them ten thousand times ten thousand angels presenting their homage to God the King. (Chap. 4.)

Presently the seer observes in God's right hand a book, that is, a roll, sealed with seven seals. It is the book of human destiny. Christ alone is worthy to break the seals and open the book and reveal the future. And Christ appears on the throne with God, in the form of a Lamb as if slain. Amid choruses of praise, which accompany the action through the whole work like the lyric choruses of a Greek tragedy, the Lamb takes the book and one by one breaks the seven seals. And now the visions of the future begin. (Chap. 5.)

In all the Jewish expectation of the future, great emphasis was laid on the "woes" which were to precede the

end. These doubtless represented the concentration of the powers of evil for a last onslaught on the armies of God, and also the general breaking-up of social and physical order connected with the end of the world. They were sometimes called the birth-pangs of the Messiah. The gospel apocalypse in Matthew, chapter 24, has much to say of them. In our book they occupy with most elaborate development a very large part of the action, and enable the author to find suitable place for his traditional material. The great series of foreign invasion, wars, famine, pestilence, cosmic disturbance, is spread before us in a panorama of overwhelming awfulness.

As the seals are successively broken, four horses with their riders appear — a white horse of foreign conquest, a red horse of war, a black horse of famine, a pale horse of pestilence. At the fifth seal the souls of all martyrs cry out to be avenged; at the sixth the earth quakes, the sun becomes black and the moon red, the stars fall and the heavens are removed. We seem ready for the consummation when the seventh seal shall be broken. (Chap. 6.)

But no; an interlude of two visions. From the Twelve Tribes 144,000 persons are first sealed, that they be not hurt; and then the prophet sees before the throne the countless multitude from every nation rendering homage to God and to the Lamb. Logically these interjected visions are hard to explain; esthetically and emotionally they have admirable artistic value. For a moment the tension is relieved, we breathe freely as we see the glorious reality beyond these dark events; then the clouds shut in again and the grim series is continued. The seventh seal is broken; but it does not bring the end. Instead it introduces a new series of seven — the seven blasts of great trumpets. Hail and fire mingled with blood desolate the earth; the third part of the sea is made blood; the third part of rivers becomes wormwood; the third part of the

sun and moon and stars is darkened. At the fifth trump a star falls, and from the abyss come forth demonic locusts with the stings of scorpions, under their king Apollyon the Destroyer. They are perhaps an army of centaurs. The sixth trump sounds, and a still greater barbarian invasion from the great river Euphrates is let loose. We are again ready for the seventh trump, and the end — but the end is not yet. (Chaps. 7-9.)

Instead, after a renewed impartation of knowledge to the seer through a little book which he swallows (Chap. 10), appear two forerunners of the Messiah, perhaps Moses and Elijah, as the Jewish expectation on the basis of Malachi's prophecy had foretold. (Chap. 11.) They shall meet with martyrdom at the hand of the beast from the abyss, but shall be restored to life and ascend up into heaven in a cloud. And in that hour there was an earthquake, and the tenth part of the Holy City fell.

Then the seventh angel sounded, and the whole court of heaven raised their voices in praise to God because now at length the rule of the world has passed over to the Lord and to his Christ, and the time has come for the dead to be judged, and for the prophets and saints and all the God-fearing to be rewarded. (Chaps. 10, 11.)

But again for the reader this is not yet. We are still delayed in order to have brought before us the most singular and least well explained section of the whole book. A great sign is seen in heaven. A woman clad in the sun, with the moon under her feet, gives birth to a son who is to be the Messiah and to rule the nations with a rod of iron. A great red dragon stands ready to destroy the child. But the infant is caught up to God to be preserved, the woman escapes to a place of safety, there is war in heaven, and the great red dragon, who is called the Devil and Satan, is cast down from heaven to earth, where he carries on his persecution of the woman and the rest of her seed. (Chap. 12.)

What does this mean ? Can it all refer to the future ? Was the Messiah not yet born ? Whence the imagery ? Who is the woman ?

A type of ancient myth is found in different religions in forms varying in detail. The Greeks told of the birth of Apollo from Leto, the attempt of the dragon Pytho to kill the child, and his rescue by Boreas and Poseidon. With the Egyptians it was Isis, or Hathor, the mother of Horus, who fled from the dragon Typhon and escaped to an island. The twelfth chapter of Revelation does not seem to be an allegory derived from the facts of contemporary history. It may be that a current myth has here guided the pen of the Christian apocalypticist.

But what does he mean ? Apparently he has for once turned back from his picture of the future to a revelation of the heavenly counterpart and spiritual substratum of the events of the recent past. By the aid of this mythological narrative he portrays the events in heaven which have given rise to the occurrences that he and his contemporaries have actually known on earth. The birth of the Messiah was conceived as a fact in heaven apart from but yet parallel to his earthly appearance. He is now in heaven, he will come to judge and rule; meantime to the war in heaven which followed his birth have succeeded the persecutions from the Devil which the Church has undergone. These distresses have thus not been accidental, but are a part of the necessary development of events. The Messiah is with God. The Devil has been conquered in heavenly warfare, and is at present making his last stand on the earth. The joy of the angels is justified. Men on earth may look beyond the torment of persecution to final triumph and lasting peace.

In this chapter about the woman we have thus an interpretation of the experiences of the Church in years then recent. In the next chapter (13) this account of the significance of real events is continued with reference to the

more recent past and to the present, and so, after, as it were, going back and picking up another significant thread and following it down until it joins his main thread, the writer returns to his dramatic picture of the future.

A beast now appears from the sea with the power of the Devil. He is the imperial power of Rome, which makes war on the saints. Another beast comes from the earth. He may be the Antichrist, in whom the world-power of evil was to be concentrated, and he is the servant of the beast Rome, and the latter's agent in promoting the worship of the Emperor. We are dealing here with imaginary figures; the beasts do not represent real persons; it is the relations intended which are real. The imaginary figures are indeed not wholly the puppets of the allegory; they have some dramatic vitality of their own; but the relations of spiritual forces are those which the writer saw actually manifested in his own world. (Chap. 13.)

The number of the Beast is 666. No explanation of this is quite satisfactory. The usual one is that the name which finds its numerical equivalent here is Nero Cæsar. By another reckoning the number is taken as referring to the Emperor Gaius. At any rate the atrocities of the persecution of the Christians in the reign of Nero, and the horrors of Nero's general misgovernment, seem to be reflected in these chapters.

The distress seems now to have reached its height, and the end is drawing on. Various signs are given that herald it — angels fly in mid-heaven and proclaim the destruction of the modern Babylon, visions are seen of the Lamb and of those virtuous souls who come victorious from the beast and are free in heaven to praise the works and ways of the Lord God Almighty. Again we have a series of seven — seven angels with bowls, that is, *pateræ*, such as were used for pouring libations at an altar. The bowls, however, contain, not new phases of the onset of evil, but

the outpourings of the wrath of God's punishment on a wicked world. The earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun receive this wrath. It is poured on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom is darkened. A foreign invasion from the far East — a Parthian peril — breaks loose, and ends with the battle of Armageddon. (Chaps. 14-16.)

“And the seventh [angel] poured out his bowl upon the air; and there came forth a great voice out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done.’ . . . And Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.” Then follows the judgment of the great harlot, the scarlet woman on her blasphemous beast. The details introduce the seven hills of Rome, and the series of Roman emperors — first down to Vespasian, and then in a modified statement down to Domitian. Through it all gleams the lurid figure of Nero, the dead, who in the popular superstition is yet alive and to return. (Chaps. 16, 17.)

The downfall of Rome with all her grandeur and luxury and crime is depicted in a kind of elegy of triumph. She is mourned by princes and merchants and seafarers who gained their living by ministering to her lust.

“And a strong angel took up a stone, as it were a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, ‘Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all.’ And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in thee; and the voice of a mill shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee; for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that have been slain upon the earth.” (Chap. 18.)

But a great voice of a great multitude in heaven cried, “Hallelujah; salvation and glory and power belong to our God.”

With that the scene changes completely.

“And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse and him that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. . . . And his name is called the Word of God.” (Chap. 19.)

The Messiah is come.

And so the hosts of evil are defeated. The dragon, which is the Devil and Satan, is chained for a thousand years. The hopes of the people of God are accomplished in this millennium, in which their due share falls to the martyrs and confessors who in the first resurrection rise and reign with Christ. At the end of the thousand years is launched the last ineffective assault of the dragon. He seeks out, in the uttermost corners of the earth, the last barbarians, Gog and Magog. They are destroyed by fire before the beloved city, and the Devil is cast for ever and ever into the lake of fire and brimstone.

Then ensues the general judgment of all the dead, who are raised from hades and receive according to their works; and there follows the end of death and of hades, for they with the wicked are thrust into the lake of fire. (Chap. 20.)

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . and the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” The place of eternal bliss in fellowship with God is brought to the righteous. All things are made new and shall endure for ever. History is ended, eternity begun. (Chap. 21.)

“Behold I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.”

This bald summary can do no proper justice to the crowded pageant of the Book of Revelation, throughout overburdened with rich embroidery of splendid detail. Three brief observations remain to be made.

First, it has, I hope, been made clear that the Book of Revelation is no useless allegory of modern or of ancient history, but is a work, indeed a masterpiece, of literary art. The natural result of modern study of this book is to lead one to enjoy and to love it, to receive from it an influence upon his mind and heart. We can see that this book of the Bible, by being — even though imperfectly — understood, is restored to its place of dignity as a worthy expression of the human spirit. This increase of the legitimate claim of the book on the reverent interest of men is the proper and usual result of serious modern criticism. For on understanding the book much of what was repellent falls into its fit place, and is no longer a disturbing element.

Secondly, this book, with its visions of the future, its strange imagery, and its lofty poetry, brings us into direct contact with a generation of real Christians — their ideals and emotions, their dangers and aspirations, their love and worship, their hatred and abhorrence. We see here the reflection of their sufferings, and learn at what a price our comfortable privileges have been bought. We are stirred by their power to see the eternal and invisible, and our own faith should be made stronger by this contact with theirs.

Thirdly, not only literary and historical, but religious value belongs to this book. The great truths of apocalyptic and eschatological thought are permanent, and no church can be powerful which does not hold them with firmness and vitality. For they are the truths that right and wrong are eternally hostile, that God's cause is the cause of righteousness, and that His triumph is sure.